

**NEWS ALERT**



U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

**Homeland Security Committee**

Rep. Bennie G. Thompson, Chairman



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson**

### **H.R. 1684: “Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008”**

March 28, 2007 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee markup of H.R. 1684, the “Department of Homeland Security Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008”:

“I am pleased that the Committee is considering H.R. 1684, a bill to authorize the Department of Homeland Security. In true Committee form, this is a bipartisan bill. Staff on both sides worked long and hard to craft a bill that does far more than simply authorize appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security. It puts the Department on a path to becoming what Congress envisioned and the American people deserve.

The bill provides \$39.8 billion to the Department, \$2.1 billion more than the President requested. This funding goes a long way to restoring much-needed assistance to our communities so they can meet the challenges of a post-9/11 world. We started this process by giving some thought to the ‘State of the Department of Homeland Security.’

There’s been some noticeable progress in the management and operations of the newest Federal agency. But there has not been enough.

We simply cannot ignore that four years into its existence, the Department remains on the GAO’s ‘High Risk’ list and is rated the ‘Worst Place to Work’ in the Federal government. With that in mind, we crafted a well-focused bill that accomplished a few critical goals.

It establishes greater oversight of the Department; Brings more transparency and accountability in the Department’s procurement activities; Provides the Department’s workforce with the resources, training and respect they deserve; and Enhances strategic planning throughout the Department.

I could review the bill title-by-title but, in an effort to move things along, I will highlight just a few key provisions. The bill authorizes the Directorate of Policy – in hopes that the Department will finally develop a strategic vision.

The bill creates Comprehensive Homeland Review, similar to the Defense Department’s QDR process. This assessment will allow each President to determine whether the Department’s assets are properly aligned to achieve its mission.

H.R. 1684 also provides enhanced funds to the Department’s Inspector General to execute its audit and investigations mission and undertake enhanced scrutiny of the Secure Border

Initiative. The IG is a valued partner to the Secretary and the Congress. He needs to have the people and resources to do oversight right.

In 2005, DHS spent about 43% of its budget on contractors and on goods and services. In 2006, DHS spent 40% of its budget on goods and services. That means that nearly half of the money to be appropriated to the agency will be put in the hands of contractors and vendors. We need assurances that the Department gets what it pays for and that the procurement process is open and fair. To that end, the bill requires the Chief Procurement Officer to establish a procurement training program. It also gives her authority to bring retirees with substantial contracting experience on board to help with acquisitions.

The bill also makes great strides in opening doors for small businesses. It enhances support for the mentor-protégé program. The legislation also requires the Department to take a hard look at the weaknesses in how it does business with small and disadvantaged businesses.

Additionally, I am particularly pleased that the bill includes language to authorize the Centers of Excellence Program. I am a strong supporter of this collaborative program. Some of our best ideas on how to combat terrorism come from these great educational institutions.

As a representative with more than a few Minority Serving Institutions in my district, I am particularly pleased that the bill provides \$8 million for the MSI program. I am especially happy that the bill creates an opportunity for an MSI to partner directly with the Department.”

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